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SUBJECT: GERMAN ELECTIONS: CSU TO CDU - YOU STILL NEED US BADLY

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Chancellor Merkel and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) depend on Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU) to do well in the September 27 Bundestag election in order to strengthen the overall CDU/CSU result. Any CSU result within polling ranges of 43 to 46 percent would beat any CDU outcome in any other state, meaning the CSU could account for up to seven percent of the national vote. This would make them the indispensable partner for Chancellor Merkel in post-election negotiations with either the Social Democratic Party (SPD) or the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The CSU's relative strength in those negotiations depends on how well the CSU does in relation to the CDU. Bavarians expect a return of the Grand Coalition but the CSU might be able to profile itself better in a coalition with the FDP, with whom it squabbles in the CSU/FDP coalition in Bavaria. Within a future national governing coalition, the CSU would advocate tax reductions, more regional power in decision making, and arms-length EU negotiations with Turkey. End Summary.

CSU - Kingmaker: Perhaps; Indispensable Partner: For Sure

2. (SBU) The CSU, Europe's strongest regional party, is polling consistently at around 46 to 48 percent of the vote in Bavaria, with low-side polls at around 43 percent. A strong showing in Bavaria could translate into seven percent of the overall national vote and Chancellor Merkel is counting on such a good CSU result to boost the CSU/CDU totals. Unless something totally unexpected happens on polling day, the CSU can expect to be part of the next government coalition, be it a continuation of the current Grand Coalition or a CDU/CSU-FDP coalition (black-yellow), its declared goal. The CSU will be the smallest partner of any coalition, however. CSU power will depend in large part on how well the CSU does in relation to the CDU. For example, in 2005, the CSU got 7.4 percent of the national vote. This translated into 46 Bundestag mandates and two ministerial posts.

CSU Aims High

3. (SBU) It seems certain that the CSU will not reach its self-declared goal of 50-percent-plus in the Bavarian vote; commentators and most honest CSU members know those days of absolute majorities are gone. The latest poll from last week sees the CSU at a respectable 46 percent, down two percent from its good 2009 European Parliament election result of 48.1 percent and down three percent from its 2005 Bundestag election result. However, two Consulate contacts, one a German Foreign Service officer and the other an executive in the State Chancery, told us September 24 that they believed 43 to 44 percent, at the lower polling ranges, was a realistic estimate. Matching the devastating 43.4 percent showing in the 2008 state election would be very bad news for Bavarian Minister President and CSU party chairman Horst Seehofer and would limit the CSU's influence in any future government coalition.

#### CSU Would Keep Minister Posts in a Grand Coalition

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¶4. (SBU) Most Bavarian commentators and insiders expect a renewal of the current Grand Coalition, albeit in a weakened state that might not survive the full legislative period. In a Grand Coalition, nothing much would change as far as the CSU is concerned, unless the party showed well at the top of its polling range, around 48 percent, and at the same time the CDU showed relatively weakly. In this case, the CSU could even hope to get three ministerial posts. In a Grand Coalition, the two CSU Federal Ministers, Economics Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg and Agriculture Minister Ilse Aigner, would probably retain their portfolios. If the CSU wins only 43 percent, at the bottom of its polling range, this could undercut its power in coalition discussions. Still, the CSU would most likely retain two Ministerial posts.

#### A CSU-FDP Coalition Could be Tense but Good for CSU

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¶5. (SBU) Despite the recent friction between the CSU and FDP over economic issues, a black-yellow coalition could offer the CSU better chances to get what it wants. The CSU would be relatively stronger in a black-yellow coalition than in a grand coalition. This could bring a third CSU Ministerial post and better chances to achieve platform goals such as income tax cuts. A black-yellow coalition would probably lead to a different Ministerial makeup, particularly in view of the FDP's likely claim on the Economics Ministry.

#### COMMENT

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¶6. (SBU) In any coalition, the CSU would advocate tax reform, greater subsidiarity in EU matters, and arms-length negotiations with Turkey, with which the CSU advocates "privileged partnership" and not full EU membership. With MP Seehofer, the CSU would also continue to pursue social issues, and with the FDP, the CSU would be pulled to sharpening its profile as the "conservative party with a social conscience," based on Seehofer's populist leanings. There are also important differences between CSU and FDP plans for tax reform, which could be a source of strain. The reflected glory from having the FDP in the federal coalition could strengthen them in Munich at the expense of the CSU. At the same time, local CSU-FDP tensions could transfer to Berlin if MP Seehofer chose to go that route.

¶7. (U) Consulate General Munich coordinated this report with Embassy Berlin

¶8. (U) Track Munich reporting at <http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Germ> any.

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